

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT DIVISION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Audit Committee Members
FROM: Jim Pellegrini, Deputy Legislative Auditor, Performance Audits
DATE: October 5, 2006
CC: Randall Mosley, Adjutant General, Department of Military Affairs
Reid Lund, Director, Montana Youth Challenge Program
RE: Follow-up to Performance Audit- 07SP-004: Montana Youth
Challenge Program, Department of Military Affairs (orig. 04P-14)

Introduction

In March 2005 we presented our performance audit of the Montana Youth Challenge Program (MYCP). The audit made five recommendations to the Department of Military Affairs and one recommendation to the legislature. In July of 2006, we began gathering information from the department and MYCP on their progress in implementing the recommendations. This memo summarizes the results of our follow-up work in addition to presenting background information on the program.

Overview

Audit recommendations focused on improving efficiency of resources in the both the recruiting and mentoring departments of the Montana Youth Challenge Program. The Department of Military Affairs has taken varying degrees of action on each of the five recommendations addressed to them in the performance audit. The audit contained one recommendation that was addressed to the Legislature. This recommendation has not been implemented because the Legislature has not met since the recommendation was made.

Background

MYCP was established in 1999 to target high school drop outs ages 16-18 years old with at-risk behaviors such as violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and criminal behavior. MYCP is a 22-week residential program in Dillon, Montana, followed by a 12-month community-based mentoring program. The Challenge program was established by the U.S. Congress in 1992 and has been adopted by half the states. The Department of Defense National Guard Bureau (NGB) is responsible for leading the program at the federal level. Montana's program is administered through the Department of Military Affairs.

MYCP attempts to prevent rather than treat destructive behaviors. Challenge participation is voluntary and applicants must meet certain eligibility requirements including being drug-free, not

having previous felony convictions, and not being involved in ongoing court actions. MYCP strives to recruit approximately 100 cadets for each of the two classes held during the year.

Follow-up Audit Findings

The performance audit report included six recommendations, five to the department and one to the legislature. The five recommendations directed toward the department focus on the recruiting and mentoring aspects of the program. The following summarizes information relating to follow-up audit work and the implementation status of recommendation.

Recommendation #1

We recommend the department improve documentation standards for the eligibility review process by retaining eligibility checklists and ensuring attachments adequately document resolution of eligibility issues.

Implementation Status – Implemented

The department has fully implemented this recommendation. The MYCP has established a checklist for the applicant's folders to ensure all required documentation is present. They have also added a comment section to this checklist. This section is used for any necessary follow-up on the application. The recruiting department has adopted a practice that for any eligibility issues written in the comment section of the new checklist, supporting documentation is required to demonstrate resolution of the issue.

Recommendation #2

We recommend the department analyze program recruitment data and target recruitment resources based on student drop out rates for individual high school districts.

Implementation Status – Being Implemented

MYCP has begun collecting data for the number of applicants, cadets enrolled, and graduated. However, the program has also increased their recruitment efforts by sending out routine mailings to entities such as county schools, Kiwanis, Rotary, Youth Dynamics, and AWARE. The program has not yet targeted recruitment according to dropout populations in high schools around the state. They indicated they have begun working with Office of Public Instruction and will look at dropout data to target their recruitment efforts to those schools with the higher dropout rates.

Recommendation #3

We recommend the department:

- A. Collect and analyze data relating to American Indian participation in Montana Youth Challenge.**
- B. Where necessary, pursue programmatic changes to decrease attrition rates for American Indian cadets.**

Implementation Status – Partially Implemented

MYCP has increased their efforts in recruiting American Indian students. They are traveling to each reservation in Montana to give presentations and have met and discussed the program in detail with tribal leaders from each American Indian tribe in Montana. MYCP analyzes American Indian attrition rates for the program but this is the only type of data collected and analyzed specific to American Indian cadets. MYCP has begun a new practice of talking to parents upon receipt of an application from an American Indian student. They found that many parents did not have a full understanding of the program and its intent. Program personnel believe this new practice has helped provide more family support to American Indian cadets. MYCP management does not believe major programmatic changes will lend to a decrease in

attrition rates for American Indian students. They also state that the program is defined by the National Guard Bureau and they are not at liberty to make major programmatic changes. Despite their increased efforts for recruiting and educating American Indian families about the program the attrition rate is still quite high for this specific population.

Recommendation #4

We recommend Montana Youth Challenge Program document evidence of background checks for all potential mentors.

Implementation Status – Implemented

The mentoring department of MYCP has created a checklist for the entire process of the Youth Challenge Program. The program began using this checklist in June of 2006. Each cadet's folder contains this checklist and the proper documentation for background checks and mentor matches.

Recommendation #5

We recommend the department continue to pursue improvements in collection and reporting of long-term outcome data for the Montana Youth Challenge Program.

Implementation Status – Being Implemented

MYCP is collecting long-term data on cadets that have graduated from the program. They choose to collect data on each class four years after the graduation. Currently the data is collected and reported in conversation form. Information gathered on each cadet is documented in a narrative (about one paragraph on each cadet). The mentoring department is trying to move to more of a data collection and documentation method rather than conversational. This will provide consistency in the information collected and will result in a spreadsheet format rather than a narrative.

Recommendation #6

We recommend the Legislature enact legislation to provide authorization and operational guidance for the Montana Youth Challenge Program.

Implementation Status – Not Implemented

The Department of Military Affairs has not initiated any agency sponsored legislation to address this recommendation and the Legislature has not met since this recommendation was made. The 2007 Legislature will meet in January, and at that time they may choose to address this recommendation.